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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

Reporting period from 5 November 2016 to 28 February 2017

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) since my predecessor's report of 4 November 2016 (S/2016/931).

2. My Special Coordinator for Lebanon continued to provide the good offices of the United Nations, in coordination with the International Support Group for Lebanon, to support the efforts of Lebanon to address its security and stability challenges. The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally calm. Both parties remain committed to resolution 1701 (2006). The parties did not, however, use the prevailing calm to effect progress on their outstanding obligations under the resolution and towards a permanent ceasefire.

3. In a welcome political achievement, on 18 December 2016, Prime Minister Saad Hariri formed a new Government, which was endorsed by Parliament on 28 December 2016. As Parliament's term is due to end on 20 June 2017, it is important that preparations for new elections, in accordance with the electoral calendar, continue in conformity with the country's constitution and its democratic practice.

4. Lebanon's stability and security also remain contingent on developments in the neighbouring Syrian Arab Republic. The Lebanese Armed Forces continued to play a vital role in maintaining security on the border with the Syrian Arab Republic and throughout Lebanon, including in countering threats from terrorist extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front.

5. As of 31 December 2016, the number of Syrian refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stood at 1,011,366. Both President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Hariri have repeatedly highlighted the need for the international community to provide greater assistance in this regard.

6. The situation in the Palestine refugee camps remained generally calm, with the exception of Ein El Helweh camp, where serious clashes between extremist militants and Fatah members resulted in a number of fatalities and disruptions of

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essential services of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The construction of a security perimeter around the Ein El Helweh camp, initiated by the Lebanese Armed Forces, in 2014, resumed in late October 2016, but was subsequently suspended.

II. Implementation of resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

7. The environment in the UNIFIL area of operations was generally stable, with relatively few ground violations of the Blue Line. Nevertheless, tensions mounted when the Israeli Defense Forces removed a soil barrier on 19 January 2017, east of United Nations position 9-63, near El Adeisse (Sector East). This barrier had been placed by Lebanese municipal workers south of the Blue Line in March 2016 (see S/2016/572, para. 10). Also on 19 January, civilians, municipal police and, subsequently, personnel of the Lebanese Armed Forces arrived at the location while Israeli Defense Forces personnel observed the area from south of the Blue Line. Several journalists were also present. When a standoff ensued between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Israeli Defense Forces soldiers, with both sides aiming weapons at each other, UNIFIL deployed along the Blue Line to prevent further escalation of the situation. Later that day, when the situation had calmed down and most personnel of the Lebanese Armed Forces had left, Lebanese municipal workers, against UNIFIL advice, rebuilt a soil barrier south of the Blue Line. The situation has since remained quiet.

8. UNIFIL frequently observed groups of Lebanese civilians, carrying cameras, walking along the Blue Line, violating it on occasion, primarily in the Houla and Blida areas (Sector East). On 8 November 2016, an excavator deployed by the Israeli Defense Forces to carry out vegetation clearance violated the Blue Line in the Alma Ash Shaab (Sector West) area. Lebanese shepherds with their flocks continued to cross the Blue Line, mainly in Bastrah and Shab'a Farms areas (Sector East), despite warnings by UNIFIL personnel. On two occasions, the Israeli Defense Forces detained shepherds who, it said, had crossed the Blue Line. In the first instance, on 9 November 2016, a shepherd was detained briefly and returned north of the Blue Line in the vicinity of Kafer Chouba (Sector East). In the second case, on 6 January 2017, the Israeli Defense Forces detained a shepherd in the area south of Ayta ash-Shab area (Sector West). UNIFIL facilitated his return to Lebanon through the Ras Naqoura crossing several hours later. A UNIFIL investigation into the incident is ongoing. There was a notable increase in Blue Line violations in the area of Blida (Sector East), where Lebanese civilians, occasionally in groups, frequented a well, located just south of the Blue Line, which the municipality had cleaned in November 2016. On 25 and 27 November 2016 and on 13 December 2016, soldiers of the Lebanese Armed Forces violated the Blue Line at the location of the same well.

9. UNIFIL's freedom of movement was largely respected. On a few isolated occasions, UNIFIL troops were subject to aggressive behaviour and obstruction of movement. In the most serious incident, on 3 February 2017, a group of civilians blocked a UNIFIL patrol near Majdal Zun (Sector West) with a van and motorcycle, and hit UNIFIL armoured vehicles with iron bars and wooden poles, while some climbed onto the vehicle and attempted to reach for the gunner. As the UNIFIL vehicles moved out of the location, after pushing aside the vehicular roadblock, they were followed and subjected to stone-throwing in Majdal Zun before the patrol made a safe exit from the area by once again pushing aside civilian vehicles used as

roadblocks. The civilians continued to follow the UNIFIL patrol and, while passing through the neighbouring village of Al Mansuri, the group turned its aggression on another UNIFIL patrol in the area, hitting the armoured vehicles with stones and bars, while one civilian in a car pointed a pistol at the UNIFIL patrol. All UNIFIL personnel safely evacuated from the location without injuries, although the patrol vehicles were severely damaged. The UNIFIL investigation into the incident is ongoing.

10. Other incidents included two cases of stone-throwing, the seizure of a UNIFIL map and the breaking of the mirrors of a UNIFIL vehicle. On 22 December 2016, UNIFIL peacekeepers, seeking to mitigate tensions between Lebanese civilians and Israeli Defense Forces soldiers at the Blue Line in the vicinity of Marun al-Ra's (Sector West) encountered aggressive behaviour by Lebanese civilians, who took a mobile phone from a UNIFIL peacekeeper, which they handed over to intelligence branch personnel of the Lebanese Armed Forces. The phone was later returned. In two separate incidents at El Adeisse, local civilians behaved in an unfriendly manner towards UNIFIL peacekeepers, on one occasion trying to place a Hizbullah flag on a UNIFIL armoured personnel carrier, and in the other case driving aggressively close to UNIFIL vehicles. In a few instances, Lebanese civilians walking in the vicinity of the Blue Line demonstrated an unfriendly posture towards unarmed military observers of Observer Group Lebanon and tried to obstruct their movement. In all incidents, UNIFIL engaged with the Lebanese Armed Forces to defuse tensions and ensure that UNIFIL's freedom of movement was respected.

11. UNIFIL continued to observe civilians, mostly engaged in hunting activities, carrying unauthorized weapons in the area of operations. Sightings of armed hunters increased, particularly in the areas of Meiss Ej Jebel and Blida, despite a Lebanese ban on hunting. On 16 February, the Lebanese Armed Forces issued a statement reminding citizens that hunting is prohibited. On three occasions, UNIFIL observed individuals carrying assault rifles; in one instance, four men on two scooters fired in the air with an assault rifle and two hunting rifles while passing a United Nations position near Dayr Kifa (Sector East). UNIFIL observed, on several occasions, the presence or firing of small arms, including during weddings and funerals. In all cases, UNIFIL informed the Lebanese Armed Forces of the violations.

12. In a reported firing incident across the Blue Line on 26 October 2016 in the Kafer Kela area, one soldier of the Israeli Defense Forces was lightly wounded by a ricochet bullet near the technical fence. The Israeli Defense Forces stated that the soldier had been shot at from a car driving along the road north of the Blue Line. Israeli Defense Forces soldiers responded by firing shots at the suspected vehicle. UNIFIL did not observe the incident. The Mission engaged immediately with the Israeli Defense Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces to prevent further escalation and to ensure calm. The UNIFIL investigation into the incident is ongoing.

13. The Israeli Defense Forces continued to allege that Hizbullah maintains military infrastructure and equipment in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL monitors the area of operations and the Blue Line and reports all violations of resolution 1701 (2006) that it observes, including the presence of unauthorized armed personnel or weapons. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL does not proactively search private property for weapons in the south unless there is credible evidence of a violation of resolution 1701 (2006), including an imminent threat of hostile activity from that location. Where specific information is received regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations, UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, remains determined to act with all means available within its mandate and capabilities. To date, UNIFIL has neither been provided with, nor found, evidence of an unauthorized transfer of arms into its area of operations. The Lebanese Armed Forces command continued to

confirm that it would act immediately to put a stop to any illegal activity in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006) and relevant Government decisions.

14. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis, mostly with unmanned aerial vehicles, but also with fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and of Lebanese sovereignty. On 16 January 2017, the Israeli Defense Forces informed UNIFIL that one of their unmanned aerial vehicles had crashed on Lebanese territory south of Alma Ash Shaab (Sector West) in the vicinity of the Blue Line. UNIFIL informed the Lebanese Armed Forces, which conducted a search operation in the area. Lebanese media reported at the time that Hizbullah had found and taken possession of the remnants of the unmanned aerial vehicle. The Lebanese Armed Forces subsequently informed UNIFIL that nothing was found and that the Lebanese Armed Forces had no independent information of a crash. UNIFIL protested all air violations to the Israeli Defense Forces and called upon the Government of Israel to stop them immediately. The Government of Lebanon also protested the air violations to UNIFIL.

15. The Israeli occupation of northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line continued in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and of Lebanese sovereignty. To date, Israel has not provided a response to the proposal submitted by UNIFIL to both parties in 2011 aimed at facilitating the withdrawal of the Israeli Defense Forces from the occupied area. The Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL, in July 2011, of Lebanon's agreement to the proposal.

16. Relations between UNIFIL and the local population remained largely positive. The Head of Mission and Force Commander continued to meet local authorities and religious leaders, while the Mission's military and civilian personnel conducted regular and frequent meetings with community representatives in the area of operations, underlining the importance of cooperation between United Nations peacekeepers and host communities in maintaining the existing calm while working together for sustainable peace.

17. The Mission, working with Government institutions as well as with United Nations and other partner agencies, continued to support the extension of State authority in the area of operations and to address the needs of the local population, including through quick-impact projects focused on urgent social and economic needs, such as waste management and the empowerment of women. In the context of supporting community resilience and enhancing local capacities for protecting civilians, UNIFIL also continued regular training courses for municipal police and civil defence volunteers in fire-fighting tactics and rescue missions. UNIFIL contingents continued to provide medical, dental and veterinary assistance to communities.

18. The Lebanese Armed Forces remained deployed with two reduced-strength brigades in the area south of the Litani River. In the light of the tense security situation along the border with the Syrian Arab Republic, the Lebanese Armed Forces maintained a reinforced presence in the north-eastern part of the UNIFIL area of operations (Shab'a village and the Arqub area).

19. UNIFIL conducted an average of over 13,600 operational activities per month in the area of operations, including vehicle and foot patrols, checkpoints and observation tasks. UNIFIL continued to perform approximately 10 per cent of its total operational activities in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The percentage increased to about 16 per cent when taking into account only those operational activities that UNIFIL could conduct jointly with the Lebanese Armed Forces. Foot patrols ("market walks"), conducted jointly by the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL in villages and urban areas, provided additional opportunities for regular direct contact with the local population.

20. As part of its periodic risk and threat assessment reviews, UNIFIL identified no imminent threat of physical violence against civilians during the reporting period. UNIFIL continued its Mission-wide planning efforts and training for the protection of civilians. UNIFIL conducted several exercises to enhance Mission preparedness, while also taking into account the role of humanitarian actors.

21. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force continued to carry out maritime interdiction operations and training for the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy. During the reporting period, the Maritime Task Force hailed 1,643 ships, 333 of which the Lebanese authorities inspected and cleared. Training focused on Lebanese Armed Forces Navy personnel who command such maritime interdiction operations. On land and at sea, UNIFIL conducted joint and coordinated exercises, lectures and training courses with the Lebanese Armed Forces to enhance operational capabilities and effectiveness, including on the use of coastal radar, boarding and medical support.

22. The Maritime Task Force maintained a visible presence in the southern part of the area of maritime operations to prevent tensions between Israel and Lebanon. The Maritime Task Force does not have a mandate to monitor the line of buoys installed unilaterally by Israel and recognized neither by the Government of Lebanon nor the United Nations. The Israeli Defense Forces continued to carry out maintenance activities at the buoys, at times with divers. On several occasions, Israeli Defense Forces patrol boats south of the line of buoys fired machine gun rounds or flares and dropped explosive charges to turn away Lebanese fishing boats.

B. Security and liaison arrangements

23. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander maintained frequent and regular bilateral contacts with Lebanese and Israeli authorities and facilitated three tripartite meetings with delegations from both sides, which aimed to bolster the prevailing calm and stability and prevent incidents between the parties resulting from misunderstandings or actions by individuals. The parties consistently expressed their commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line and to maintain stability along and across it. Both sides stated to UNIFIL their keen interest in not letting regional developments destabilize the situation in southern Lebanon and northern Israel.

24. When tensions arose in areas close to the Blue Line, UNIFIL used the open channels established with both sides, combined with a proactive deployment of its liaison component, military observers and units on the ground, to help prevent violations of the Blue Line, mitigate misunderstandings and misperception of actions and build trust and confidence between the parties. This proved to be particularly effective in sensitive areas such as Blida, where the annual olive harvest in Lebanese-owned fields straddling the Blue Line took place without incident.

25. The meetings of the tripartite forum continued to see active and constructive engagement by the parties in discussing violations of resolution 1701 (2006), including ground violations of the Blue Line, Israeli air violations and the continued occupation of northern Ghajar by Israel, as well as actions and activities considered provocative by the other side. The Israeli Defense Forces expressed concern about what they considered reconnaissance activities by individuals or groups of men, at times carrying weapons, moving on foot or in vehicles in close proximity to the Blue Line, at times violating it and on some occasions attempting to intimidate UNIFIL personnel observing their activities. The Lebanese Armed Forces objected to what they considered extensive and intrusive observation by the Israeli Defense Forces into Lebanese territory from fixed assets along the Blue Line, as well as from the air covering the length of Lebanese territory.

26. The visible marking of the Blue Line on the ground continued in 12 locations where UNIFIL teams demined access lanes and constructed markers. During the reporting period, 6 markers were completed, 15 markers remained under construction, while numerous older markers were refurbished. Currently, 46 points are being measured and 17 are in the process of verification by the parties. The total figure for Blue Line work progress, as at 9 February 2017, was 326 demined, 278 measured, 263 constructed, 246 verified and, since start of the refurbishment project in February 2016, 215 refurbished.

27. The establishment of a UNIFIL liaison office in Tel Aviv remains pending.

28. The Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL maintained continuous engagement through the strategic dialogue process, which forms an integral part of the Lebanese Armed Forces capability-development plan, and continued to promote international assistance for the benefit of the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed in the UNIFIL area of operations. Together with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, UNIFIL participated in the Lebanese Armed Forces Executive Military Commission and conducted regular consultations with donor representatives to promote international assistance and facilitate resource mobilization for the Lebanese Armed Forces in support of its responsibilities under resolution 1701 (2006).

29. As mandated by the Security Council in its resolution 2305 (2016), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is finalizing, on my behalf, a strategic review of UNIFIL, as a follow-up and update to the 2012 strategic review, in order to examine the structure of the Mission's uniformed and civilian components and related resources with a view to ensuring that the Mission is configured most appropriately to fulfil its mandated tasks. A multi-disciplinary team led by the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, visited UNIFIL, Beirut and Tel Aviv from 15 to 22 January 2017. I will communicate the final conclusions and recommendations of the strategic review to the Security Council in early March.

C. Disarming armed groups

30. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups outside the control of the State continued to restrict Lebanon's ability to exercise its full sovereignty and authority over its territory. The ministerial statement of the Council of Ministers of 28 December 2016 addressed the need for a national defence strategy through dialogue, but no meetings of the national dialogue were held during the reporting period.

31. On 6 December 2016, the Israeli Defense Forces published a document purporting to be a declassified map of the Hizbullah military infrastructure in Lebanon on social media, in which it asserted that Hizbullah was "hiding behind Lebanon's civilians" and qualified this as "a war crime". On 8 December 2016, an Israeli Defense Forces spokesperson clarified that the map was illustrative in nature, while maintaining that Hizbullah kept military assets amongst the civilian population.

32. On 11 February 2017, in an interview with Egyptian media, President Aoun stated, in response to a question about Hizbullah and its weapons, that there was a "need for its presence to complement the role of the army" and that it was "an essential part of defending Lebanon." On 13 February 2017, in another media engagement, the President stated that the issue of Hizbullah's weapons was subject to the national defence strategy, while reiterating that Lebanon had to "use special means for fighting, in which regular and popular forces take part" since it was

"unable to assemble a military force capable of confronting those forces" hostile to Lebanon. This was followed by a statement on 14 February by Prime Minister Hariri on the occasion of the commemoration of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, in which he noted a sharp disagreement about Hizbullah's weapons, and stated that what protected the country was that there was a consensus on the army, the legitimate forces and the State, and only the State.

33. In a televised statement on 16 February 2017, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, indicated that his organization had something that could change the course of any war, and he reiterated previous warnings that Hizbullah could reach Israeli gas storage and nuclear installations. Prime Minister Hariri's opening remarks to the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 17 February, according to a press release from his office, stressed that protecting Lebanon and the Lebanese from the external risks also comes from the policy adopted by the President of the Republic and the Government, based on the respect of international conventions and resolutions, especially resolution 1701 (2006).

34. The Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in identical letters addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me on 13 and 17 February 2017 (S/2017/133 and S/2017/148, respectively), reacted to the above-mentioned statements by President Aoun and the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, underscoring the need to condemn the latter's "dangerous and aggressive statement". In his letter dated 23 February 2017, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations denounced threats by senior Israeli officials to destroy Lebanon.

35. The United Nations has recalled Lebanon's obligations under resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), noting that adherence continues to be of vital importance to Lebanon's stability and security.

36. Since 1 November 2016, coordinated efforts by the Lebanese Armed Forces and security services have resulted in the arrest of a high number of individuals suspected of affiliation with extremist groups or involvement in terrorist activities throughout Lebanon. Arrests have included the dismantling of a terror cell in Tripoli, on 30 December 2016, which was reportedly planning attacks during the holiday season, the arrest on 10 January 2017 of an ISIL affiliate reportedly gathering intelligence for an attack in downtown Beirut, and the arrest on 21 January 2017 of an ISIL-affiliated Lebanese would-be suicide bomber in a coffee shop in Beirut.

37. Violence also targeted members of the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces. On 5 December 2016, a soldier of the Lebanese Armed Forces was killed in an attack on a Lebanese Armed Forces position in Biqa' Safrin, allegedly by ISIL affiliates. Later that month, a member of the security forces was shot dead in Choueifat, south-east of Beirut, and a member of the Lebanese State security forces was wounded in the area of Akkar.

38. There was no progress in the dismantling of the military bases maintained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada, contrary to the 2006 decision of the national dialogue. The bases continue to compromise Lebanese sovereignty and impede the ability of the State to effectively monitor and control parts of its territory.

39. The situation in the Palestine refugee camp of Ein El Helweh remained unsettled. Violent clashes took place among factions and in the context of operations by the Joint Palestinian security forces, in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, against extremist groups operating out of the camp. Individuals suspected of association with armed groups continued to surrender to the Lebanese authorities.

At least 15 of the 17 fatalities recorded during the reporting period in Palestine refugee camps occurred in Ein El Helweh, with two other fatalities reported in the Mieh Mieh camp. On 29 January 2017, an attempt to assassinate a security official at the embassy of Palestine in Sidon, adjacent to the Ein El Helweh camp, was reported. On 18 February 2017, the Joint Palestinian security forces were formally dissolved, following internal disagreements. The security situation subsequently deteriorated due to armed clashes between Fatah and extremist groups, which resulted in five fatalities and several injuries, displacement, damage to infrastructure and limits on freedom of movement. UNRWA services in the camp were temporarily suspended. Following the breakdown of a first ceasefire agreement on 26 February, a second ceasefire on 28 February included the restoration of a joint security arrangement, as well as the handing over to the authorities of 138 fugitives.

40. During the reporting period, the Lebanese Armed Forces resumed the construction of a security perimeter and a series of watchtowers around Ein El Helweh, a process initiated in 2014. Following demonstrations by Palestinian camp residents, and as a result of proposals for alternative security measures by Palestinian factions, the construction works were suspended.

41. The Government of Lebanon, with the support of the United Nations, continued to advance the development of Lebanon's national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism, in line with the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism presented by the Secretary-General in 2016. The national strategy on the prevention of violent extremism is regarded as an independent but integral component of the Government's overall approach to reinforcing the country's stability and security. The ministerial statement of the Government of Prime Minister Hariri also includes a reference to the need to develop a national counter-terrorism strategy.

D. Arms embargo and border control

42. With regard to the concerns of ongoing arms transfers to Hizbullah, the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in his identical letters of 21 November 2016 addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/987), reiterated the view of Israel that Hizbullah had been carrying out a massive military build-up in Lebanon. The Permanent Representative stated that Hizbullah had amassed more than 120,000 rockets and missiles, many of which had the range to target any city in Israel, and had stationed them amid the civilian population in southern Lebanon. The Permanent Representative also advised of the alleged use of commercial flights from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Beirut and to Damascus for the onward transfer of arms and related materiel to Hizbullah, with the goal of enhancing its arsenal.

43. On 24 November 2016, the Chairman of the Beirut international airport issued a statement strongly refuting reports regarding such use of the airport. In identical letters dated 25 January 2017 addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (A/71/770-S/2017/80), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations stated that the letter of the Permanent Representative of Israel contained "fabrications and false claims". The Permanent Representative of Lebanon also conveyed a statement by the Lebanese Ministry of Defence to the effect that it was "fully committed to implementing Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), especially with respect to the prohibition on the entry or smuggling of weapons to any party whatsoever through Lebanese State facilities". In identical letters dated 22 November 2016 addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/992), the chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations asserted

that the claims were baseless and represented unsubstantiated accusations. The United Nations takes all allegations seriously but is not in a position to verify them independently.

44. Hizbullah remained openly engaged in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 13 November 2016, reports on social media appeared about a Hizbullah military parade near Qusayr in the Syrian Arab Republic, close to the Lebanese border, depicting large numbers of fighters, vehicles and equipment. In a speech on 23 December, Secretary-General Nasrallah acknowledged Hizbullah's participation in the battle for Aleppo and praised its outcome as a big military, political and moral development for their front. On 12 February 2017, Mr. Nasrallah again referenced Hizbullah's presence in the field in the Syrian Arab Republic and on 16 February acknowledged losses of martyrs in the field on the front lines and in bloody battles. A number of Lebanese nationals were also reported to be fighting with anti-Government armed groups in the Syrian Arab Republic.

45. Recorded incidents of cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon have decreased even further. However, the situation a'ong the border remained tense, requiring continuous operations by Lebanese Armed Forces against militant threats. Arsal remained a flashpoint. On 25 November 2016, Lebanese Armed Forces conducted a major operation there, arresting a commander and 10 militants affiliated with ISIL, reportedly linked to the bombing attack in Al-Qa'ah of 27 June 2016. Hizbullah also continued to engage in fighting ISIL and the Nusrah Front in the border area. Four ISIL operatives were killed under unclear circumstances in separate incidents on 14 November 2016, 23 January 2017 and 7 and 15 February. Fighting also continued between ISIL and the Nusrah Front. Two individuals were reported shot and wounded, one on 28 November 2016 by ISIL and the other on 13 January 2017 by unknown assailants. Alleged weapons suppliers for militants on the outskirts of Arsal were arrested on at least three occasions in the border area. Efforts to secure the release of the nine servicemen that remain in ISIL captivity continued.

46. In the Biqa', on 9 November 2016, Lebanese Armed Forces foiled a cross-border infiltration attempt. In the border town of Majdal Anjar, on 30 November, Lebanese Armed Forces arrested an individual suspected of supplying weapons and of links to the 2014 bombing attacks in the Biqa' and southern Beirut. On 18 January 2017, Lebanese Armed Forces reportedly closed a number of illegal border crossings in the northern Biqa' by removing makeshift bridges.

47. The security plans of the Lebanese Armed Forces for Tripoli, the Biqa' and southern Beirut remain in place, but sporadic incidents nevertheless occurred. On 9 November 2016, Sheikh Bassam Tarras, charged in relation to the Zahlah bombing of 31 August, was released from prison on bail; on 31 January 2017, the Internal Security Forces arrested another suspect in the case. On 9 December 2016, heavy weaponry was reportedly used in clashes in Beirut's southern suburb. On 28 December, an improvised explosive device targeting a passenger bus killed one and critically injured another in al-Ain in the Biqa'.

48. International support to the Lebanese Armed Forces, with a view to strengthening its border capacity and completing the deployment of land border regiments and watchtowers, continued. On 29 November 2016, members of the Executive Military Commission, a coordination mechanism established pursuant to a call by the International Support Group for Lebanon, met to further coordinate efforts in support of the capability development plan of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

E. Landmines and cluster bombs

49. Five manual mine-clearance teams, one explosive ordnance disposal team and one mechanical mine-clearance team continued to be deployed in the UNIFIL area of operations to reduce the threat of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. UNIFIL demining teams cleared 93 m^2 of land and destroyed six anti-personnel mines to allow access to points to be marked on the Blue Line. Furthermore, the United Nations Mine Action Service conducted 10 quality assurance visits and 16 safety monitoring visits to UNIFIL demining teams, along with 2 landmine/explosive remnants of war safety training sessions and 1 explosive ordnance awareness briefing to United Nations personnel.

F. Delineation of borders

50. No progress was made towards the delineation or demarcation of the Lebanese-Syrian border during the reporting period, including in areas where it is uncertain or disputed. That step is necessary to enable the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority throughout all Lebanese territory, and for the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces to secure the borders and prevent the transfer of arms or related materiel. There was no progress on the issue of the Shab'a Farms. Responses from Israel or the Syrian Arab Republic are still outstanding with regard to the provisional definition of the Shab'a Farms area as proposed in my report of 30 October 2007 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2007/641).

G. Political and institutional stability

51. The swift formation of the new Government on 18 December 2016 was an important sign of the reactivation of political institutions in Lebanon. Following the appointment of Prime Minister Hariri, the International Support Group met separately with both President Aoun and Prime Minister Hariri to reiterate a number of guiding principles in the partnership between the international community and Lebanon. Since the parliamentary vote of confidence in the Government and its ministerial statement on 28 December, the Cabinet has met regularly and passed a number of important decrees.

52. The Security Council has repeatedly stressed the critical importance of electing a new Parliament before its current term expires on 20 June 2017, in accordance with the Constitution, as that will be crucial to the stability of Lebanon and its resilience in withstanding regional challenges. Discussions continue on the appropriate law for the legislative elections. Reaffirming its commitment to the stability and security of Lebanon, the Beirut-based International Support Group, on 22 February, encouraged all parties to arrive at an early compromise and underlined that the timely conduct of peaceful and transparent parliamentary elections was an important step to preserve the democratic tradition of Lebanon and to meet the aspirations of the Lebanese people.

53. The ministerial statement of Prime Minister Hariri's Government contained important undertakings regarding peace, stability and security in Lebanon. It reaffirmed that the Government respected all international instruments, was committed to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and would continue to support United Nations forces in Lebanon. Prime Minister Hariri reiterated his Government's strong commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) in a letter to me on 2 January, as well as in regular interaction with my Special Coordinator. In my response letter to Prime Minister Hariri, I stressed that the provisions of resolution

1701 (2006), together with other key Security Council resolutions and the long-standing policy of disassociation, remained essential for the stability of Lebanon and its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

54. The ministerial statement further underscored the need for Lebanon to be kept out of foreign conflicts in order to remain safe from the regional fire raging around it. It also committed to securing the requirements of the military and security services to fully carry out their duties to protect the State, the people and the land.

55. The ministerial statement emphasized several priorities that also define areas of cooperation between the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, including effective governance, economic recovery, combating poverty and stamping out corruption. Prime Minister Hariri and members of his Cabinet have held a series of meetings with the United Nations in Lebanon to strengthen the long-standing partnership between the United Nations and Lebanon. The operationalization of the United Nations integrated strategic framework, based on the three pillars of peace and security, political stability and social and economic stabilization, has been a key priority since its adoption in October 2016.

56. There has been renewed diplomatic activity by the leadership of Lebanon and its partners. The visits by President Aoun to Saudi Arabia and Qatar in early January 2017 and to Egypt and Jordan in early February, as well as visits to Lebanon by several representatives of countries in the region, are examples of renewed constructive engagement in the interests of the country's stability and security.

57. During the reporting period, the Lebanese Cabinet approved several decrees to advance the exploitation of the country's maritime oil and gas resources. In a positive step towards ensuring accountability and good governance, Lebanon has since committed to applying the standards of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. The Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, in a note verbale dated 2 February 2017, expressed its objection to non-consensual Lebanese economic activity in maritime areas belonging to Israel. It called upon the Government of Lebanon to refrain from advancing non-consensual activities in such areas, while reiterating its openness to dialogue and cooperation with relevant neighbouring States in accordance with the principles of international maritime law.

58. Since the establishment of its national human rights institution in October 2016, the Government of Lebanon has received nominations for members of the institution. A swift selection will allow the institution to commence its mandated work. The adoption of a code of conduct on human rights standards by the General Security Directorate is a further encouraging sign of the State's commitment to improve its compliance with standards and obligations in accordance with recommendations of the Committee against Torture and the universal periodic review.

59. Prime Minister Hariri and his Government have taken a number of measures to mitigate the impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon. That includes the appointment of a State Minister for displaced Syrians, tasked with the development of a national policy regarding Syrian displacement and the formation of an interministerial committee. That committee, led by the Prime Minister, would bring together the Ministers for the Interior, Social Affairs, Labour, Foreign Affairs, Education, Environment, Public Works, Economy and Trade and the Minister for displaced Syrians.

60. Syrian refugees in Lebanon remain reliant on international assistance for their survival. Some 71 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live below the poverty line. Many experience food insecurity and live in precarious housing conditions. Many of the Syrian refugees are forced to turn to negative coping mechanisms, such

as early marriage, begging or child labour. Some 30 per cent of Lebanese citizens also live below the poverty line, and around 10 per cent live in extreme poverty.

61. Donors continue to respond generously to support Lebanon in mitigating the impact of the Syrian conflict and to assist Syrian and Palestinian refugees in the country. In 2016, resources allocated to Lebanon reached $1.88 billion, with $1.54 billion disbursed or committed for that year, including $1.26 billion provided to United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations under the 2016 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan. At the launch of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan for 2017-2020 in Beirut on 19 January 2017, the Prime Minister appealed for continued support and stressed the need for longer-term development support to Lebanon, over and above humanitarian assistance. With regard to the follow-up to the London Conference on Syria in 2016, in particular the issue of a temporary waiver of the $200 residency fee for Syrian refugees, some tentative measures were announced with regard to certain categories of refugees. The Government continues to work with the United Nations towards an appropriate solution.

62. Palestinian refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic remain particularly vulnerable. At the end of December 2016, the number of Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA was around 32,000. A combination of poverty, limited access to employment and their precarious legal status would appear to be "push" factors to induce onward movement. An estimated 65 per cent of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in poverty, as do 90 per cent of Palestinian refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, including 9 per cent who live in extreme poverty. Unemployment stands at 23 per cent among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and 53 per cent among Palestinian refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic.

III. Security and safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

63. UNIFIL continually reviewed its security plans and risk mitigation measures, particularly following security threat warnings, and closely coordinated them with the Lebanese authorities. Commemorative or celebratory shooting continued to pose a threat to both UNIFIL personnel and the local population in the UNIFIL area of operation.

64. UNIFIL conducted three security exercises during the reporting period aimed at strengthening security preparedness and testing contingency plans for emergency situations that might require the evacuation and/or relocation of UNIFIL civilian staff and eligible dependants.

65. UNIFIL continued to monitor ongoing proceedings at the Lebanese Military Court against individuals suspected of planning or perpetrating serious attacks against UNIFIL. With regard to the attack against UNIFIL peacekeepers serving with the Spanish contingent in 2007, a hearing at the Permanent Military Court planned for 3 February 2017 was rescheduled for procedural reasons to 29 May. In a case of terror intent, opened in January 2014, the Court held a hearing on 7 December 2016; the next hearing is scheduled for 20 March 2017. In the case of an attempted serious attack against UNIFIL in 2008, in which one of four sentenced perpetrators filed an appeal, the Military Court of Appeal held one hearing on 17 January and scheduled the next for 9 May. In three cases of serious attacks perpetrated in 2011 against UNIFIL peacekeepers from France and Italy, investigations are ongoing. The case of homicide in 1989, when three UNIFIL peacekeepers from Ireland were shot dead, came back to trial in 2015 upon the repatriation to Lebanon of the perpetrator, who had been sentenced in absentia. The

latest hearing at the Permanent Military Court in that case was held on 27 January, and the next one is scheduled for 17 March.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

66. As at 6 February 2017, UNIFIL comprised 10,564 military personnel, including 411 women, from 40 troop-contributing countries; 236 international staff, including 73 women; and 579 national civilian staff, including 144 women. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force comprised two frigates, three corvettes, one offshore patrol vessel and one fast patrol boat, and 855 of the Force's total military personnel, including 7 women. In addition, 53 military observers, including 2 women, of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization were under the operational control of UNIFIL.

V. Conduct and discipline

67. UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon continued to strengthen existing preventive measures against sexual exploitation and/or abuse. The United Nations country team on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse network and task force reviewed current measures and assessed whether changes in the risk environment would necessitate amendments. During the period under review, UNIFIL received one allegation of sexual exploitation and/or abuse that was promptly processed. No allegations of sexual exploitation and/or abuse were received by the Office of the Special Coordinator.

68. In addition to the existing internal complaints mechanisms for UNIFIL and the Office of the Special Coordinator, information on submitting complaints of any behaviour falling short of the highest standards (including sexual exploitation and/or abuse) was disseminated internally and externally in Arabic and English. The UNIFIL Civil Affairs Section regularly informs local religious and political leaders about the procedures for reporting any misconduct involving UNIFIL personnel that they may become aware of, thereby ensuring that such incidents are brought to the attention of the Force leadership in a timely manner.

VI. Observations

69. I welcome the political and institutional progress Lebanon has achieved since the election of President Aoun. I congratulate Prime Minister Hariri on his assumption of the premiership and the subsequent swift formation of a Government under his leadership. Further to the ministerial statement, the Government's commitment to working to restore the confidence of the citizens of Lebanon in the country's institutions and towards political and economic revitalization has been evident. The resumption of regular Cabinet meetings and parliamentary legislative sessions are encouraging signs that the State institutions of Lebanon are again functioning effectively.

70. The political progress to date also represents an opportunity to continue strengthening and extending the authority of Lebanon. In that regard, the fact that Hizbullah and other groups continue to maintain weapons undermines the authority of the State and stands in contradiction to the country's obligations under resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). It may also affect the country's constructive reengagement with the region and the confidence of international

partners. The Security Council, in resolution 1701 (2006), called for the full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords, and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, so that, pursuant to the Lebanese Cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese State.

71. I condemn the threat made by Hizbullah Secretary-General Nasrallah against Israel on 16 February, which cannot be justified by the stated purpose of deterrence. Rhetoric threatening the use of force by any of the parties undermines the relative calm and stability that has prevailed among them. All sides should refrain from such threats, as they exacerbate the risk of tension or miscalculation, which could lead to renewed conflict.

72. Building on the ministerial statement of 28 December 2016, it is important for Lebanon to continue to demonstrate genuine commitment and adherence to resolution 1701 (2006) and other relevant resolutions. In that context, I welcome the Prime Minister's positive reference to resolution 1701 (2006) of 17 February and the reiteration of the full commitment of Lebanon to relevant resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006), conveyed in the 23 February letter from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations. It is key that Lebanon adhere to its commitment to relevant resolutions and to the requirement to disarm all armed groups in Lebanon, so that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State.

73. I encourage the President of Lebanon to reconvene the national dialogue to guide the formulation of a national defence strategy that would address the maintaining of arms outside the control of the State and other relevant elements of resolution 1701 (2006). It also remains important that earlier decisions of the national dialogue be implemented, specifically those relating to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada.

74. Occasional serious violations and tensions along the Blue Line underline the importance of the UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements to de-escalate tensions, address the risk of miscalculation in a timely manner and prevent small incidents from deteriorating into violence on a larger scale. I am encouraged by the active engagement of both parties with UNIFIL to manage potentially sensitive situations, as well as the restraint the parties have shown in responding to situations and in working through UNIFIL to maintain security and stability for the communities living on either side of the Blue Line.

75. The proactive use by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israeli Defense Forces of the established liaison mechanism to share information on planned activities and deployments with UNIFIL has proven to be of immense importance and utility. I encourage both Israel and Lebanon to continue to actively use the UNIFIL liaison channel to address issues of concern as well as alleged violations, rather than take unilateral action. The open and constructive exchanges in the tripartite forum, including on serious and long-standing violations of resolution 1701 (2006), are a testament to the commitment of the parties as well as the trust they place in UNIFIL and the liaison and coordination arrangements.

76. I call upon both parties to ensure continued respect for the Blue Line, irrespective of each party's reservations, which will have to be addressed in the context of formal border demarcation, and to prevent violations that could jeopardize calm and stability in southern Lebanon. Any deliberate violation of the Blue Line, in particular by armed forces personnel, is unacceptable. The marking of the Blue Line remains of strategic importance for the cessation of hostilities, and I encourage both parties to continue to actively engage in that process with UNIFIL.

77. I am seriously concerned regarding the almost daily violations of Lebanese airspace by the Israeli Air Force, in clear disregard of Lebanese sovereignty and the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). I am also concerned about the continued occupation of northern Ghajar and an adjacent area by the Israeli Defense Forces. I call upon the Government of Israel to engage closely with UNIFIL to withdraw Israeli forces from northern Ghajar and to cease all violations of Lebanese airspace.

78. I remain equally concerned about the continuing presence of unauthorized weapons in the area between the Litani River and the Blue Line, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). In addition, the firing of weapons poses a risk to the population and UNIFIL personnel. I call upon the Government of Lebanon to take all actions necessary to ensure that there are no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the UNIFIL area of operations.

79. It is the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon, as the host Government, to ensure the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and their freedom of movement throughout the area of operations. While I note the overall positive relationship between UNIFIL and the local population, as demonstrated by their many interactions, I urge the Lebanese authorities to continue to cooperate with UNIFIL to guarantee the adequate protection of peacekeepers, including by bringing to justice the perpetrators of acts committed against them.

80. The ongoing maritime interdiction operations by the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force form an important contribution to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), in addition to serving as a deterrent and a stabilizing factor in a highly volatile environment.

81. Continued efforts remain necessary to solidify the calm that has prevailed over the last decade and move past the current precarious status quo towards a permanent ceasefire. I invite both parties to consider, with my Special Coordinator and the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, mutual confidence-building measures and steps as a sign of practical commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) that can help sustain the calm and advance stability.

82. It is vital for its stability and security that Lebanon remain committed to its disassociation policy, consistent with its commitment in the Baabda Declaration. I echo the calls of the Security Council, including in its presidential statement of 22 July 2016 (S/PRST/2016/10) and its press statement of 19 December, for all Lebanese parties to recommit to the country's policy of disassociation, and reiterate my call upon Hizbullah and all Lebanese parties to cease any involvement in the Syrian conflict.

83. I condemn the movement of fighters and war materiel across the Lebanese-Syrian border in breach of resolution 1701 (2006) and the shelling and shooting into Lebanese border areas from the Syrian Arab Republic. The lack of a delineated, demarcated Lebanese-Syrian border is no justification for violations of Lebanese sovereignty by any party. I call upon all concerned to cease violations of the border and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

84. In the spirit of sustaining institutional progress, I call upon the leadership of Lebanon to move forward with the conduct of parliamentary elections in accordance with the electoral calendar and the adoption of a national budget and a national defence budget. Ongoing efforts to arrive at an agreement on an electoral framework, which will enable timely parliamentary elections, should be supported. The timely conduct of parliamentary elections, in accordance with the Constitution and reflecting the country's democratic traditions, will be critical to the stability of Lebanon. I welcome the commitment by leaders, including Prime Minister Hariri

and Speaker Nabih Berri, to the introduction of a women's quota that will ensure the adequate representation of women in Parliament.

85. The continued threat of terrorism and the successful operations by the Lebanese Armed Forces to counter it are a further illustration of the crucial role of the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Lebanese Armed Forces bear sole responsibility for protecting Lebanon, defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity and advancing the Government's efforts to extend State authority in the field of security. I encourage the international community to continue its support to the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces, stretched by multiple security challenges. I commend the Lebanese Armed Forces for their valiant role in protecting Lebanon and offer my condolences over the loss of life of Lebanese Armed Forces personnel in the course of duty.

86. I welcome the continued generous donor support to Lebanon in regard to addressing the needs of Syrian refuges and other vulnerable populations. While continued high levels of humanitarian funding remain essential, it will be equally important to mobilize additional, longer-term development resources either through grants or concessional loans. Lebanon needs support to achieve long-term investment, economic growth and employment opportunities which benefit refugees and host communities alike. I call upon all Member States to honour and build on their pledges to date and to reinforce their assistance to help Lebanon cope with the impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

87. I welcome the decision by the Government to ensure more structured and regular engagement with international partners through a high-level steering committee in order to agree on joint priorities and ensure the alignment of efforts.

88. Cooperation between the Lebanese authorities and Palestinian factions remains important to prevent and contain violence. I welcome the agreement, following a bout of violence, to re-establish a joint security arrangement in Ein El Helweh, which I hope will ensure security in and around the camp. Security measures should at all times be compatible with humanitarian principles and human rights standards. Funding for UNWRA remains a priority, and I reiterate my call upon donors for greater support to UNRWA in order to enable it to effectively assist Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

89. I welcome the Government's steps to advance the development of a national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism in Lebanon. I encourage national and international stakeholders to engage in that effort in close collaboration with the United Nations and international partners.

90. The political and economic stability of Lebanon is a matter of shared regional and international interest and requires continued collective attention. I welcome the unity the Security Council has consistently demonstrated to insulate Lebanon from regional crises. I welcome the continued country-level engagement of the International Support Group in Beirut and urge the Group to remain mobilized in support of the country's political and socioeconomic stability. I call upon Lebanon to sustain such partnership in the framework of key principles established with the international community, and encourage regional partners to use their influence constructively to help protect Lebanon from the spillover of regional conflicts.

91. I wish to extend my appreciation to all countries contributing troops and equipment to UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon. I thank my Special Coordinator, Sigrid Kaag, and the staff of her office, the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Michael Beary, and the civilian and military personnel of UNIFIL for their continued efforts.